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ABSTRACT

The study tested relationships between patterns of parent-youth-interaction and two aspects of identity formation; the extent to which an adolescent explored alternatives and the degree to which he or she had made commitments. Interviews assessing aspects of the identity process were conducted with 99 Danish students, age 17 and 18. Independent raters assigned each subject to one of Marcia's categories based on the extent of his exploration and commitment. A selected sub-sample (N=21) participated with their parents in triad consensus tasks. Molecular analysis and impressionistic ratings of these triad situations revealed distinctive styles of interaction for families of youth in each of the identity categories. (Author)

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ABSTRACT FOR PRESS

Title: ADOLESCENT IDENTITY PROCESS AND PATTERNS OF FAMILY INTERACTION

Author: David R. Matteson, Ph.D., Governors State University, Park Forest South, Il

Presented: Aug. 30, 1975, APA CONVENTION, Division 7 Tape Session

What factors in the family allow some youth to make positive steps to improve our society, while other youth become alienated and drop out, or give in and lead a life of conformity?

A study reported by Dr. David Matteson begins to answer this question. Seventeen and eighteen year old students were interviewed and categorized by identity types roughly equivalent to the responses listed in the question above. Then these students were observed while interacting with their parents. It was found that the more conforming youth came from homes with dominating fathers. Youth who were more independent, but afraid or unwilling to commit themselves came from families where parants of the same sex appeared weak and passive. Girls of this type had passive mothers; boys had quiet, unresponsive fathers.

However, youth who had developed independence and an ability to see the complexities of life, but were willing to commit themselves and to get involved, came from families where an open sharing of emotions occured. These families were the most willing to disagree with one another, yet were less negative than other families. They put little emphasis on sex roles. All three members (youth, mother and father) were actively involved in the discussion.

Dr. Matteson sees his results as providing tentative confirmation for his theory that sterotyped sex roles are one cause of the alienation of today's youth--a theory he has elaborated in his book ADOLESCENCE TODAY: SEX ROLES AND THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY.

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ABSTRACT FOR TAPE SESSION DIVISION 7, DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY
ANNUAL CONVENTION OF THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION
CHICAGO, FALL 1975

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Background and Scope of the Experiment:

Previous experimentation regarding family correlates of the adolescent identity statuses (Cross & Allen, 1970; Jordan, 1970, 1971) has at least three major limitations. To date, all the experiments which have gathered family data have used only male subjects. Second, all the identity status studies have been conducted on college populations in the U.S.A. Third, no direct observations have been made; parent-youth interaction has been assessed solely on the basis of the verbal reports of adolescents and parents.

Research comparing verbal report data with actual observations has shown that socially acceptable stereotypes tend to cloud verbal reports, so that no differences are reported among families which, when actually observed, have very different patterns of interaction (Farina, 1960; Caputo, 1963). The experiment reported here provided data from direct observations of interactions between Danish students of both sexes and their parents.

Sample and Procedure:

The first phase of the project will be reviewed briefly as background to the family interaction study, which is our focus. Subjects were the 99 students, ages 17 and 18, in the middle class of two Danish gynasiums located in suburban Copenhagen. Subjects were interviewed by Danish graduate students concerning their developing identity in four areas: vocation, politics, sex roles, and values. Independent raters scored recordings of the interviews on two variables: The extent to which the youths engaged in a search among alternatives before committing themselves to a particular choice, and the firmness of their present commitments. On

the basis of these ratings the subjects were assigned to one of four general "statuses" (Marcia, 1966) briefly described below:

Foreclosures seemed to have made their commitments with little exploration of alternatives or crisis. They experienced few doubts about the direction they were heading, and made few conscious choices.

Diffusion subjects had become aware of alternatives, and were floating between possibilities with little if any commitment. They did not seem to be involved in a serious struggle to identify themselves in relation to alternatives or to make commitments.

Moratorium youth were in the midst of an identity crisis, trying to decide between alternatives. Their commitments were vague and general, but there was a sense of active struggle, moving toward commitment.

Identity Achievement subjects seemed to have gone through doubt and indecision, explored a number of competing possibilities, and finally made a clear choice.

All subjects took a battery of personality tests, the results of which increased our confidence in the validity of the categories for Danish youth. (The usefullness of the categories had already been attested to by some 30 American studies; for a critical review see Matteson 1974, 1975).

From this index group of 99 students, 21 family triads were selected as the subjects of the family interaction phase of the project. Since very few of our initial population were categorized as "identity achievement" the family study was limited to the remaining three identity statuses. Only students from intact families were asked to participate. Of those asked, slightly over one-third of the parents complied and produced usable data. Twelve female and nine male students were involved; each of the 21 triads consisted of a student and the student's mother and father.

The three family members were asked to write endings to two incomplete stories. One story concerned a young man who discovered wrong-doing in the firm where he worked, but would risk losing a free education if he were to report it. The second story concerned a student who discussed with his father his indecision about contin-

uing his education. The "most likely" and the "best possible" endings were elicited separately from each triad member. The family was asked to discuss each of their endings and try to agree on one ending acceptable to all triad members.

Three teams of raters worked independently and without knowledge of the subject's identity category, quantifying the data from the triad interactions. Measurements included Bales' system of Interaction Process Analysis (Bales, 1970), length of time each member spoke, order of speaking, interruptions, simultaneous talking (Farina, 1967), as well as impressionistic ratings concerning the content of story endings and the emotional tone of family members' interactions.

Nineteen hypotheses were formulated, based on data from the previous paper-pencil studies of family correlates of identity statuses (Cross & Allen, 1970; Jordan, 1970, 1971), and upon inferences from Keniston's studies of alienated and committed youth (1965, 1968). The complexity of measurements used allowed most hypotheses to be operationalized in several ways, resulting in 27 operational hypotheses. These are too complex to report here, and are available from the author (Matteson, 1974). Hypotheses concerned such issues as the passive role of fathers, predicted in diffusion families, the dominating or authorative role of foreclosure fathers, the over-protective role of diffusion mothers, etc.

Results:

Inter-rater correlations were computed, and only measures with satisfactory agreement ($r = .60$ on continuous measures; 75% agreement or better on discrete category ratings) are reported. In many instances, fairly clear differences in the styles of family interaction emerged from the data. A summary of the interactions which typified each category of families follows.

Foreclosure youth of both sexes appeared to take more leadership in the family interaction than other youth. They most often spoke first, summarized endings most, and the endings they proposed were most often similar to the endings

the family agreed upon. Foreclosure families developed an atmosphere which may best be described as task-oriented. Parents encouraged daughters to speak more frequently than in any other triads with duaghters. Perhaps in response to the conventional idealism of foreclosure youth, their parents made more attempts to urge them to be realistic. Where task-orientation yielded to some expression of feeling, the feelings were more frequently negative, especially in families with sons. This negativity may reflect these families' greater frustration at not moving toward task-completion; or it may signal conflict between sons and fathers when fathers dominate. In any case, our direct observational measurements of negativity contrasted sharply to the results of previous studies using verbal report, in which foreclosure families most often described the family atmosphere as positive.

Foreclosure fathers were clearly the most active of the fathers, speaking most regardless of the sex of the child. In families of male foreclosures, the fathers took leadership in speaking first and stating endings most--yet they lost out on the chosen ending more often than other fathers. Father of female foreclosures state endings and win endings as much or more than fathers of other girls.

In sum, foreclosure families were more consistently father dominated, more task oriented than other families, and the most successful in reaching agreement on the assigned task.

Only three families of <u>diffusion</u> youth cooperated in the triads; our data were suggestive, however, because they agreed so closely with the verbal report data of previous studies. In all our diffusion triads we observed a weak, passive youth and a weak, passive parent of the same sex. The only active person in the triads was the opposite-sexed parent. Yet the active parent did not show the behaviors which typify leadership. Diffusions, defined as passive in the identity search, turned out to be passive in family interactions as well.

Moratorium youth contrasted markedly with diffusions. Defined as actively engaged in a struggle with the family. They submitted least to parents on story endings; the moratorium females stood in sharp contrast to the other girls in the study, who tended to be submissive. Moratoriums least often lost in the consensus task, compared to other youth. They fall between diffusions and foreclosures on most measures of leadership.

The family atmosphere reflected the active style of the moratoriums. These families showed the fastest rate of interaction. There were indications of more emotional expression. The families did not seem very task-oriented; they clarified reality least, and failed to reach a consensus more often than other types. It appeared that the parents encourage autonomy and self-expression in moratorium sons. Parents of moratorium daughters, however, did less than other parents of girls to encourage their daughters' self expression. Perhaps they felt their non-submissive daughters had no need for further encouragement!

Moratorium family members participated more equally in the discussion. The fathers appeared active, but not dominating; they fell mid-way between diffusion and foreclosure fathers on measures of leadership. The mothers seemed to relate to daughters and sons more similarly than did other mothers; their level of interaction was similar regardless of the sex of the youth.

In sum, a high level of activity, with nearly equal participation of the triad members, and a failure to be task-oriented enough to reach consensus, typified moratorium family interactions.

Summary:

Direct observations of family triads showed distinctive patterns of interaction Moratorium youth were the most active; their families had the most equeal participation of all members, were highly active, and accepted disagreement rather than completing the task. Foreclosure families were the most task oriented, and most frequently completed the task. The youth, like their fathers, showed many leadership characteristics.

A.P.A. Chicago Convention
Division 7
August 30, 1975; 9 a.m. - 12 noon

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL TO CASSETTE PRESENTATION
David R. Matteson
"Adolescent Identity Process and Patterns of Family Interaction"

SUPPLEMENT 1:

THE IDENTITY STATUS CATEGORIES

Listed in the order of developmental progression through crisis to commitment:*

Foreclosure: These students appear to have made their commitments without ever having experienced a period of crisis. They seem to have experienced few doubts and made few conscious choices. They believe what they had always believed and plan to be what they had been expected and expected themselves to be. They have closed off their identity search without exploring alternatives.

Diffusions: These youth are aware of the many alternatives to identity formation, but they seem to float between possibilities with little concern about coming down to concrete commitments. They are "diffuse" in Erikson's sense of the term; they seem unable to firm up an identity. They are clearly uncommitted, with neither strong allegiances to ideology nor specific plans for the future; yet, they seem unconcerned about their lack of commitment.

Moratorium: Subjects are keenly aware of alternatives and anxiously concerned about making commitments. These youth are still in the process of crisis. They are actively involved in an intense exploration of alternatives. They are moving toward commitments and probably will later achieve identity.

Identity Achievement: Subjects appear to have gone through some periods of doubt and indecision, times when there were a number of competing possibilities among which they finally made a clear choice. They have passed through crisis to commitment and represent the mature outcome of the identity struggle.

*See Matteson, 1975, pp. 266 ff., for a more thorough discussion of the theoretical and empirical basis for this developmental progression. The data from the Danish males fit the progression well; results for Danish females were less convincing.

SUPPLEMENT 2:

NUMBERS OF SUBJECTS BY SEX AND IDENTITY STATUS

Matteson
Division 7
8/30/75

	Study One			Study Two (Family Triads)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Foreclosure	13	14	27	4	4	8
Diffusion	8	8	16	1	2	3
Moratorium	22	24	46	4	6	10
Achievement	4	6	10	0	0	0
Total	47	52	99	9	12	21

SUPPLEMENT 3:

RESULTS: PERCENTAGES OF TIME TRIAD MEMBERS SPOKE*

Identity Status and Sex of Student	Father	Mother	Student	Range
Moratorium Males	(B) 32%	(C) 27%	(A) 42%	15%
Females	(A) 43	(B) 32	(C) 24	19
Foreclosure Males	(A) 42	(B) 29	(B) 29	13
Females	(A) 52	(C) 21	(B) 27	31
Diffusion Males	(B) 30	(A) 48	(C) 22	26
Females	(A) 58	(B) 20	(B) 22	38

*Taken from Matteson, 1974, p. 50, Table 6.

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